

The Roots of German-American Friendship
Sommerhausen
September 22, 2006
Ambassador Timken

Dear Mayor Steinmann, dear Dr. Leuerer
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to visit Sommerhausen, the cradle of the German-American relationship. My wife Sue and I gladly accepted the Pastorius Society's kind invitation – all the more as it gives us the opportunity to see this special part of Germany, the Main Valley, during its best time – the "Weinlese" - and to be here in time for Sommerhausen's famous "Töpfermarkt." I also brought our new Consul General in Bavaria Eric Nelson from Munich here tonight. It is his first visit to Franken, to Mainfranken and I am sure it will not be his last.

First, let me thank all of you in the Pastorius Gemeinschaft for keeping the memory of Franz Daniel Pastorius alive, here in Germany, here in Sommerhausen. Let me thank you for putting life into the friendship between Germans and Americans. And a special thanks to you, the Steinmann family, for keeping the Pastorius House in such beautiful historical conditions.

Franz Daniel Pastorius, a son of Sommerhausen, founded Germantown in 1683. It was the first permanent German settlement in America. It established the foundation for three centuries of strong cultural, economic, and political ties. German Americans have played an important role in establishing America as a land of democracy, liberty and prosperity. Over the centuries, millions of Germans followed Pastorius to America's shores. People like my great-great-grandfather came for the same reasons as the first immigrants that settled in Germantown -- in search of freedom, the freedom to pursue their religious beliefs, the freedom to seek economic opportunity for themselves and their families. Across the centuries, America has been identified with these ideals. The United States could not have developed the way it did, nor become the society that it is today without the moral courage, and the intellectual and technical skills brought to us from the Old World, particularly from Germany.

Today, over 40 million Americans consider themselves to be of German descent. That is 15% of all Americans and it makes the German-Americans the largest ethnic element in the U.S.

Although the historical roots of our friendship run deep, the relationship between our countries has not been without its challenges. Even during the difficult days following World War II, however, the commonality between the German and American people was always evident. As the American historian Steven Ambrose noted, "the average GI found that the people he liked best, identified most closely with, and enjoyed being with were the Germans," who seemed to so many American soldiers to be "just like us."

In the last half-century, over 15 million GIs and their dependents have served and lived in Germany. They have learned about German culture and society. They have been fine ambassadors for the United States; and you have been outstanding hosts. As a result, thousands of lasting personal friendships between Germans and Americans were born. This is an extraordinary story, unparalleled to any other experience that Americans have had with a culture beyond their shores.

Those experiences have been mirrored by those of a legion of scholars and exchange students. I have made it a priority to increase the strategic impact of exchanges, and to strengthen the networks that can enhance the impact of these programs. We are exploring opportunities to encourage a more diverse segment of young Germans, including immigrants and people who may not be college-bound, to visit the United States. At the same time, we are working closely with schools and public libraries to broaden the scope of information resources available – online and in print -- because one thing is certain: sustained dialogue, information exchange, and sharing of opinions are essential to any friendship.

There is also an ever-growing number of Germans and Americans working alongside each other, part of a strong transatlantic business presence. Germany and the United States have one of the most dynamic and creative trading relationships in the world. Both Germany and the United States are known for their openness to innovation and for exceptional strengths in high technology. Business friendliness and a healthy competitive climate in both locations have meant that German companies thrive in the United States; and vice versa. Not surprisingly, Bavaria's strongest foreign trading partner is the United States.

What makes the German-American relationship so unique is that it is based on personal ties. These are the ties that bind. They are responsible for one of the greatest success stories in modern history.

Together, we confronted the devastation and the anguish of World War II with the ideals of freedom, tolerance and pluralism. In the fragile period of history following the war, a courageous, far-sighted generation of Americans and Europeans enshrined these values in the post-war institutions that define the international landscape to this day.

As all of us in this room know, however, the transatlantic agenda has changed enormously in the past 15 years but those concepts of political dialogue are, in a world plagued by an international terrorism that feeds on hatred, intolerance and fanaticism, more important than ever before.

A strong European-American partnership is critical both to face global threats and to take advantage of global opportunities. Working together, Americans and Europeans are using our combined talents, expertise, and dedication to address the globe's greatest challenges. Europe and the United States have consulted, developed joint actions, pooled

our resources and rolled up our sleeves to get the work done that is necessary to improve people's lives and advance peace and security.

We especially appreciate the steps that Chancellor Merkel has taken to reinforce the spirit of German-American and transatlantic cooperation. She has focused attention on common strategies and policies. The President is very appreciative of her contributions towards strengthening the transatlantic alliance. Germany and the United States are working closely together on a complex range of issues.

Five years after the terrorist attacks of September 11, a series of flexible bilateral and multilateral relationships have been established -- some of them, previously unthinkable. Our intelligence services, law enforcement agencies and ministries, despite the challenges posed by differing legal systems, have made crucial advances in cooperation that make it much more difficult for terrorists to operate, as we saw this summer when terrorist plots were exposed in both England and here in Germany.

A little over a decade ago, NATO was a security alliance facing a threat from the East. It included 16 countries with well trained and exercised forces -- but it had never conducted military operations. Today NATO includes 26 Alliance members and 31 partners, providing security in eight different operations. The United States and Germany stand side-by-side -- together in Germany, where the U.S. maintains troops, no longer as a protection within a divided Europe, but to help protect a united Europe from the threats of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. American and German troops stand side-by-side in NATO missions in Afghanistan, the Balkans, and elsewhere to protect freedom inside and outside Europe.

I know that the military transformation needed to respond to new 21st century challenges is an issue in this region. Transition will include some base closings but some bases, here in Bavaria, are also being upgraded as platforms for the newest technology. At the upcoming NATO summit in Riga in November, discussion will focus on how to deepen capabilities and enhance global reach.

We face serious challenges ahead. We must build on our partnership capacities. It's important that the parameters of our partnership continue to evolve. The range of the issues that concern us as global partners almost has a ripple effect -- as globalization, trade, development, energy, the environment, HIV/AIDS, trafficking, corruption become interwoven with security interests. There will be disagreement but it's important that the search for common solutions remains constructive and positive.

The basis for our partnership is firmly rooted in our common values and perceptions. Earlier this month, the German Marshall Fund released the results of its annual public opinion survey examining American and European attitudes toward the transatlantic relationship. This year, there was a focus on issues connected to the 9/11 anniversary and the ability of the U.S. and Europe to cooperate on international challenges like a nuclear Iran, Islamic fundamentalism, democracy promotion, homeland security, and the role of NATO and the United Nations. The survey shows both Americans and Europeans

expressing shared concern over global threats that override short-term, partisan political judgments. Theories about transatlantic drift were disproved by this study. In fact, Europeans and Americans, as in the past, see the world in very similar ways. They believe that the United States and Europe have a common agenda and a very firm basis on which to act and work together in the world.

Thank you.